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SUBJECT: COALITION FORCES ESSENTIAL TO IRAQ'S REBUILDING,
IRAQI DEPUTY MINISTER TELLS SINGAPORE AUDIENCE

¶1. (U) A premature withdrawal of Coalition forces from Iraq would harm the situation in Iraq, Iraqi Foreign Ministry Deputy Minister for Policy Planning, Labeed Majeed ABBAWI told a Singapore audience on September 6 at a forum on Iraq's foreign policy. A major goal for the GOI is to convince its neighbors that the Coalition forces remain in Iraq at the government's request and should remain until the security situation becomes more stable. Deputy Minister Abbawi said the sectarian violence that is so prevalent in news reports is not as severe at the grass roots level. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis support national unity and even Kurds now refer to themselves as "Iraqi Kurds." The GOI is carrying out a policy of national reconciliation that should lead to a reduction in sectarian violence. Rifts in the government are political and not sectarian in nature, he asserted.

¶2. (U) The GOI seeks to rebuild a society beaten down by "tyranny and then war." This depends on raising and training security forces capable of defending Iraq against "all foes." At the same time, the government has to strengthen the nation's economy by repairing the infrastructure, lowering inflation, and creating jobs. Deputy Minister Abbawi stressed that countries like Singapore could assist in this process by sharing expertise in capacity building through training in management and doing business in a free-market economy. He noted that Iraq would continue to pursue accession to the World Trade Organization and would work with the United Nations to implement the Iraqi Compact.

¶3. (U) Deputy Minister Abbawi discussed the efforts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to re-establish itself. It has already opened or re-opened missions in 70 countries and would be up to 86 by the end of the year. Two "emergency" recruiting drives have added 120 new officers to its diplomatic corps. 25 countries have hosted these diplomats for training. An additional 120 new diplomats are being trained in the new Iraqi Foreign Service Institute.

¶4. (U) When questioned about Iraq's relationship with Iran, Deputy Minister Abbawi said the two countries had a difficult relationship under the Saddam Hussein regime. There is on-going concern about Iran's interference in Iraq through the supply of arms and training to militants. However, he stated that Iran is now more interested in building a close economic relationship with Iraq and is taking steps to control the border. When asked about the effect of the 2008 U.S. Presidential election on Iraq, Deputy Minister Abbawi said he could not "predict the future," but it is clear that the United States remained committed to a successful Iraq. He argued that the USG strategy in the Middle East is based

on building strong ties with governments that support democracy, freedom and human rights -- principles shared by Iraq. Stability in Iraq will lead to greater stability in the region, which is in the interest of the United States, he stated.

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